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THE HINDU ANALYSIS

News Decoded for UPSC & State PCS

01 AUGUST 2026

PRELIMS · MAINS · EDITORIALS · PRACTICE MCQS

COMPILED BY

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UPSC / STATE PCS | THE HINDU ANALYSIS



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★ HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

- ▶ Each topic pairs a **concept analysis** with the actual **Hindu clipping / map / infographic** for revision recall.
- ▶ **Why in News** callouts give the peg; gold ★ **factboxes** carry static & value-addition data for Prelims.
- ▶ A **Syllabus Linkage** strip maps every topic to GS papers; end with **Mains** practice and a **10-MCQ Prelims** set with answer key.

01 Board of Peace & the ‘Historic’ Gaza Disarmament Deal

GS 2 · IR

△ WHY IN NEWS

U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the **Board of Peace** — the body Washington set up to oversee a Gaza ceasefire — has reached a “historic agreement” for the complete disarmament of Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza. Hamas acknowledged the deal but set conditions, and Israel signalled resistance.

The Hindu, Page 1 (GS 2): ‘Trump touts Gaza deal, Hamas seeks Israeli exit’

Trump touts Gaza deal, Hamas seeks Israeli exit

U.S. leader hails ‘historic agreement’ on disarmament; Palestinian militant group acknowledges deal, says it will abandon weapons only if Israel withdraws troops and ‘stops killing Palestinians’

Stanly Johnny

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday announced that the Board of Peace, an organisation Washington established to oversee a Gaza ceasefire, has reached a “historic agreement” for the disarmament of Hamas and other militant organisations in the Palestinian enclave.

“Today, the Board of Peace reached a historic agreement for the complete disarmament of Hamas and all other armed groups in Gaza. This is a monumental step toward lasting peace and security,” Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that runs parts of Gaza, made an official statement acknowledging the deal, but added that it would abandon weapons



Displaced Palestinians walk past destroyed buildings and makeshift shelters near the al-Shati refugee camp, west of Gaza City. AFP

only if Israel, which currently occupies more than 60% of the enclave, withdraws its troops and “stops killing Palestinians”.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not immediately respond to Mr. Trump’s announcement, but National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said the deal was “unac-

ceptable”. He said the “assassinations in Gaza must continue”. Israeli media quoted “a senior official” as saying in a statement that “there will be no IDF withdrawal from Gaza without the genuine disarmament of Hamas”.

According to Mr. Trump, the agreement is a step towards Gaza finally being governed by a new

Palestinian government in coordination with the Board of Peace. “At the same time, Israel will have the security it deserves, with Gaza no longer used as a base for terror attacks,” he wrote.

“This is a major milestone in the implementation of the Trump 20-Point Plan. The agreement will be carried out in carefully structured phases,” Mr. Trump said on Friday. “As disarmament is completed, Israeli forces will withdraw, and the International Stabilization Force will work with a new Palestinian police force to take responsibility for Gaza being safe for its residents and its neighbours.”

The U.S. leader thanked Egypt, Qatar, and Türkiye for their mediation efforts.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 8

What was announced

- Trump said the Board of Peace reached a **“historic agreement for the complete disarmament of Hamas and all other armed groups in Gaza”**, calling it a monumental step toward lasting peace and security.
- **Hamas**, which runs parts of Gaza, issued an official statement acknowledging the deal, **but conditioned it**: it will abandon weapons and end its rule **only if Israel** — which currently occupies more than **60% of the enclave** — withdraws its troops and “stops killing Palestinians”.
- The agreement, per Trump, is a step toward Gaza being governed by a **new Palestinian government** coordinating with the Board of Peace, with Israel retaining security so that “Gaza is no longer used as a base for terror attacks”.
- It is framed as a **major milestone in the Trump 20-Point Plan**: as disarmament is completed, **Israeli forces withdraw** and an **International Stabilization Force (ISF)** works with a new Palestinian police force for Gaza’s security.

The pushback

- **Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu** did not immediately respond; National Security Minister **Itamar Ben Gvir** called the deal **“unacceptable”** and said “assassinations in Gaza must continue”.
- Israeli media quoted a “senior official” saying there will be **no IDF withdrawal without the genuine disarmament of Hamas** — the mirror image of Hamas’s own precondition, leaving a sequencing deadlock.
- The U.S. thanked **Egypt, Qatar and Türkiye** for their mediation efforts.

Board of Peace — institutional architecture

- A **US-led intergovernmental body** established under **UNSC Resolution 2803 (2025)** to enact a comprehensive U.S. peace plan for the reconstruction of Gaza.
- It is **not under UN command**, but the “Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict” it supports carries **UNSC endorsement** — giving the initiative international legitimacy.
- **Chaired by** U.S. President Donald J. Trump; a **Founding Executive Board** of high-level diplomacy/development/economics figures includes former UK PM **Tony Blair** and U.S. Secretary of State **Marco Rubio**.

★ OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE — WHO DOES WHAT

- ▶ **Gaza Executive Board:** a supporting operational body coordinating on-the-ground activities.
- ▶ **High Representative for Gaza:** Bulgarian diplomat **Nickolay Mladenov**, the primary on-the-ground liaison.
- ▶ **NCAG (National Committee for the Administration of Gaza):** a **15-member** committee of politically independent Palestinian technocrats, chaired by **Ali Shaath** (ex-PA deputy minister), running day-to-day civil administration.

il body, established under UN Security
ve US peace plan for the reconstruction
ommand, but the "Comprehensive Plan
nt, providing it international legitimacy
posed to be chaired by US President
prising high-level figures with expertise
er UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, US Secretary

rting operational body that coordinates

Bulgarian diplomat Nickolay Mladenov

ministration of Gaza (NCAG): A 15-member
ocrats, chaired by Ali Shaath (a former
o-day civil administration.

Reference map: Israel, Gaza Strip, West Bank and neighbours — the theatre of the deal. © *Encyclopædia Britannica*

02 Ceuta Migrant Surge — the ‘Human Tide’

GS 2 · IR

MIGRATION

△ WHY IN NEWS

Around **60,000 migrants** tried to cross from Morocco into **Ceuta** — a Spanish enclave on the north-African coast — within **24 hours**, according to Ceuta's President. The images of people scaling breakwaters and swimming around border fences dramatise Europe's southern migration pressure and the leverage of Morocco as a transit gatekeeper.



The Hindu, Page 1: migrants crossing from Morocco into Ceuta. AP

Human tide



Seeking sanctuary: Migrants trying to cross from Morocco into Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in north Africa. About 60,000 migrants have crossed into the territory in 24 hours, according to Ceuta's President on Friday. AP (REPORT: PAGE 12)

Locator: Ceuta & Melilla — Spanish enclaves on Morocco's coast. BBC

Understanding the flashpoint

- **Ceuta** (and its sister enclave **Melilla**) are Spanish territories physically located on the North-African mainland, bordering Morocco — making them the **only land borders** between the EU and Africa and a magnet for irregular crossings.
- A surge of this scale typically follows a **relaxation of Moroccan border controls**, which turns migration into a **diplomatic pressure tool** in disputes with Spain/EU (e.g., over Western Sahara).
- The crossings expose the humanitarian and legal strain of the **EU's external-border regime** — balancing asylum obligations against pushbacks and rapid returns.

Geography & the strategic chokepoint



★ PRELIMS-READY FACTS

- ▶ **Ceuta & Melilla:** autonomous Spanish cities on Morocco's Mediterranean coast; the EU's only land frontiers with Africa.
- ▶ **Strait of Gibraltar:** separates **Spain (Europe)** from **Morocco (Africa)**; connects the **Mediterranean Sea** with the **Atlantic Ocean** — a global maritime chokepoint.
- ▶ Nearby anchors: **Rabat** (Morocco's capital), **Tangier/Nador** (Moroccan ports), **Gibraltar** (British Overseas Territory), **Marbella** (Spain).

Why it matters for India

- Illustrates **migration as statecraft** — relevant to India's own neighbourhood management and diaspora/labour-mobility diplomacy.
- Reinforces the exam-favourite theme of **maritime chokepoints** and their bearing on trade, energy shipping and security.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS Paper II: bilateral/regional groupings; effect of developed-country policies on migration. **GS Paper I (Geography):** important straits and their strategic significance.

03 PM Surya Sarovar Yojana — Push for Floating Solar

GS 3 · ENERGY

△ WHY IN NEWS

The Union Cabinet approved the **Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana**, a **₹5,070-crore** scheme to accelerate **floating solar power** by giving central financial assistance of up to **₹1 crore per MW** for projects on reservoirs and other water bodies. The programme targets **5,000 MW** of floating solar capacity by **2030-31**.



The Hindu, Page 10 (GS 3): Cabinet approves scheme to promote ‘floating’ solar plants.

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved the Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana, a ₹5,070-crore scheme aimed at accelerating floating solar power by providing central financial assistance of up to ₹1 crore per MW for projects installed on reservoirs and other water bodies.

The programme targets 5,000 MW of floating solar capacity by 2030-31.

The scheme, to be implemented by the Solar Energy Corporation of India, comes at a time when India has about 0.7 GW of installed floating solar capacity despite an estimated potential of 60.2 GW.

Projects receiving support under the scheme will have to include battery energy storage equivalent to at least two hours, amounting to ₹10,000 MWh across the programme, to help States meet peak demand and reduce the curtailment of renewable power during periods of



The programme targets 5,000 MW of floating solar capacity by 2030-31.

it doesn't have onsite battery storage.

Officials said the financial support was intended to “nudge” the industry to develop an alternative stream of solar capacity. Solar development in India has remained concentrated in Rajasthan and Gujarat because of their vast tracts of inexpensive land and high solar radiation.

Reservoir-based projects are expected to “diversify” installations, particularly in States with large water bodies but limited land availability.

Floating solar array on a reservoir — land-light, water-sited generation.

- India's flagship **Omkareshwar floating solar park** on the Narmada (Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh) is the country's largest at **278 MW**, scaling toward **600 MW** — but it has **no onsite battery storage**.
- Officials say the money is meant to **“nudge”** industry toward an alternative solar stream, since Indian solar has stayed concentrated in **Rajasthan and Gujarat** (cheap land, high radiation).
- Reservoir-based projects should **diversify** installations to States with large water bodies but limited land, easing two big ground-mounted constraints: **acquiring large contiguous parcels** and rising **rehabilitation & resettlement** costs.

The case for floating solar — global & national

★ FACTS, FIGURES & POTENTIAL

- ▶ **Global (2024):** ~9.6 GW of floating solar installed worldwide; nearly 90% **in Asia**, led by China's 120 MW plant on **Poyang Lake**.
- ▶ **India's target link:** supports the goal of **500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030** — aiding renewable expansion, grid stability and multi-use water-body management.
- ▶ **Top-potential States:** Maharashtra (16.28 GW), Madhya Pradesh (14.89 GW), Karnataka (13.69 GW), Odisha (12.81 GW), Telangana (10.72 GW).
- ▶ **Land problem it solves:** ground-mounted solar dominates India's ~100 GW capacity but needs **3–4× more land** than the panels occupy; acquisition is slow, costly and clashes with farming/habitation.

Significance & caveats

- **Co-benefits:** reduced **reservoir evaporation**, higher panel efficiency from water-cooling, and no competition with agricultural land.
- **Watch-outs:** higher capital cost, anchoring/mooring engineering, and possible **ecological effects on aquatic systems** that need monitoring.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS Paper III: infrastructure — energy; conservation, environment. **Mains angle:** land-vs-water trade-offs in scaling renewables; role of **storage** in firming variable power.

04 Samudra Manthan — National Offshore Exploration Scheme

GS 3 · ENERGY

△ WHY IN NEWS

To boost India's offshore exploration, the Union Cabinet approved an outlay of **₹84,084 crore** for the Petroleum Ministry's **National Offshore Exploration Scheme, 'Samudra Manthan'**. A Central Sector Scheme, its corpus runs up to **FY2030-31** and aims to catalyse reserves of more than **600 MMTOE** (million metric tonnes of oil equivalent).

The Hindu, Page 11 (GS 3): Cabinet okays ₹84,084-cr. Samudra Manthan for offshore exploration.



Where the money goes — four components

- **Deepwater drilling — ₹43,200 cr (largest share):** drilling **60 deepwater exploration wells**, with the government funding up to **50% of eligible drilling cost or ₹675 crore per well**.
- **Offshore data acquisition — ₹28,534 cr:** large-scale seismic surveys to de-risk exploration and reduce geological uncertainty.
- **Common offshore infrastructure hubs — ₹10,000 cr:** shared facilities to help commercialise discoveries.
- **Oil & gas manufacturing/services zones — ₹2,000 cr:** promote domestic manufacturing and localisation of critical equipment and services.
- EY India's Rajnish Gupta noted investment in seismic acquisition and deep/ultra-deep drilling will **reduce geological uncertainty, de-risk exploration** and lay the foundation for future discoveries — good results can **catalyse greater private investment**.

Why energy security demands this

★ SCHEME SNAPSHOT & STRATEGIC BACKDROP

- ▶ A Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas; outlay ₹84,084 crore up to FY2030-31.
- ▶ India is the world's **third-largest crude oil consumer** and a major natural-gas consumer, but import-dependent: **over 88% for oil** and **~50% for natural gas**.
- ▶ This dependence makes the economy vulnerable to **global energy-price volatility** and supply risk — sharpened during the ongoing **West Asia crisis**.
- ▶ Energy demand is **rising** while domestic production stays **stagnant** — the gap Samudra Manthan seeks to close via offshore exploration.

Analytical hooks

- Hydrocarbon exploration is **capital-intensive with a long gestation period**; the scheme reorients growth into offshore to offset **ageing onshore oil & gas fields**.
- Complements demand-side and clean-energy moves (biofuels, EVs, green hydrogen) — a **bridge strategy** for the transition, not a substitute for it.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS Paper III: infrastructure — energy; mobilisation of resources; effects of liberalisation. **Prelims:** ‘Central Sector’ vs ‘Centrally Sponsored’ scheme distinction; MMTOE as a unit.

05

Force of Law — Policing, Protest & the Rule of Law

GS 2 · POLITY

EDITORIAL

△ WHY IN NEWS

An editorial critiques the extent and nature of police action against **student protesters in Delhi**, calling it a matter of grave concern for India's democracy. The Supreme Court is seized of the matter but has done little so far to restrain a force that **appears to be acting outside the law**.

The Hindu, Page 6 (GS 2): 'Force of law' — Delhi Police are pursuing protesters, but not acting against their own.

Cabinet okays ₹84,084-cr. Samudra Manthan for offshore exploration

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

To boost India's offshore exploration efforts, the Union Cabinet approved an outlay of ₹84,084 crore to the Union Petroleum Ministry's National Offshore Exploration Scheme Samudra Manthan.

The corpus is to be utilised until FY2030-31. The overall outlay is categorised into four key components the most important of which relate to drilling 60 deepwater exploration wells for which the Cabinet has allocated ₹43,200 crore.

This is inclusive of the government of up to 50% of eligible drilling cost or ₹675 crore per well.

The other component relates to offshore data acquisition which carries an outlay of ₹28,534 crore.

Development of common offshore infrastruc-



Well oiled plan: The scheme aims at catalysing reserves of over 600 MMTOE. (For representational purpose only) GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

ture hubs to facilitate commercialisation of discoveries, which would be accounting for an outlay of ₹10,000 crore.

Finally, the establishment of oil and gas manufacturing and services zones - seeking to promote domestic manufacturing and localisation of critical equipment and services - tabulate an outlay of ₹2,000 crore.

Overall, the Union government's flagship scheme for offshore exploration aims at catalysing reserves of more than 600 million metric tonnes of oil equivalent (MMTOE).

Stimulating investments It envisages to "stimulate significant investments across the exploration and production value chain, creating long-term oppor-

tunities for industry, innovation and economic growth."

Essentially, with hydrocarbon exploration being a capital-intensive activity with long gestation period but essential for a country's domestic energy security, the scheme seeks to reorient growth into this sector (via offshore exploration) to overcome difficulties from ageing oil and gas fields.

Reflecting on the announcement, Rajnish Gupta, partner for tax and economic policy, EY India held, "Investments in large-scale seismic data acquisition and drilling of exploratory well in deep and ultra deep waters will reduce geological uncertainty and de-risk exploration and lay the foundation for future discoveries. Good results can catalyse greater private investments in the sector."

The core argument

- An **independent inquiry** into the allegations — as the Court is considering — is one thing; but an accountable force would have **swiftly acted to preserve its own honour** given what is already in the public domain.
- Videos reportedly show **male officers in uniform slapping a woman protester** and attempting to bring a lathi down on the private parts of a girl; yet the force has offered **no response on the identity** of the officer seen assaulting a young woman.
- The police are **actively pursuing** protesters using **facial-recognition and surveillance technologies** of **dubious and controversial legality** — identifying its own personnel needs no such software, only professionalism and adherence to the rule of law.

Free expression & even-handedness

- A simultaneous sweep targets **freedom of expression** online and offline; where abusive language warrants action, the applicable law should be **clearly cited and due process followed transparently** — not arbitrary action that reads as **intimidation**.
- The police seem **uninterested in acting against online mobs** threatening the protesters, even as they pursue the protesters — and have **not explained the circumstances under which pellets were fired**.
- The occasion is for both the Centre and the Court to underscore a basic constitutional principle: **nobody, including the police, is above the law**.

Constitutional & institutional frame

★ ANCHORING THE DEBATE

- ▶ **Article 19(1)(a) & (b):** freedom of speech and to assemble peaceably — subject only to **reasonable restrictions** under Art. 19(2)/(3).
- ▶ **Article 21:** due process; **Article 14:** equality before law — the principle that the State and its agents are **not above the law**.
- ▶ **Surveillance concern:** use of **facial-recognition tech** without a data-protection/legal framework raises **Puttaswamy (privacy)** proportionality questions.
- ▶ **Police accountability tools:** Prakash Singh guidelines, Police Complaints Authorities, and judicial oversight of use of force.

Way forward

- Identify and prosecute **violence by anyone** — infiltrators and errant officers alike — under clearly cited law with transparent due process.
- Restore trust by **honouring commitments** made to agitating students; arbitrary reprisal only **entrenches cynicism** among the youth.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS Paper II: functioning of the executive; separation of powers; mechanisms & institutions for accountability. **Ethics (GS IV):** use of authority, proportionality, and impartiality in public service.

06 A Healthy Tax — Taxing Foods High in Fat, Sugar & Salt

EDITORIAL

△ WHY IN NEWS

India, long focused on **undernutrition**, must now pivot to the “curious phenomenon of **overnutrition**”. Two developments push the case for nudging healthier diets: a Parliamentary Standing Committee's call for **mandatory front-of-pack (FOP) nutrition labelling**, and a national consortium's advice to levy a **health tax** on high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) foods with stricter advertising rules.

The Hindu, Page 6 (GS 2,3): ‘A healthy tax’ — the government must act to tax foods high in fat, sugar and salt.

Force of law

Delhi Police are pursuing protesters, but not acting against their own

The extent and the nature of police action, which continues in Delhi against student protesters, remain a matter of grave concern for India's democracy. The Supreme Court of India is seized of the matter, but it has done little so far to restrain the police, which appears to be acting outside of the law. To have an independent inquiry that examines the allegations being raised — as is being considered by the Court — is one thing. But an accountable police force would have swiftly acted to preserve its own honour and reputation, considering what is already available in the public domain. Its male officers in uniform appear in videos slapping a woman protester, and attempting to bring down a lathi on the private parts of a girl. The Delhi police is actively pursuing protesters who were apparently present at the protest site, using facial-recognition and other surveillance technologies, the legality of which remains dubious and controversial. Yet, it has offered no response regarding the identity of the officer seen openly assaulting a young woman at a public gathering. The Delhi police would not require any software or Court intervention to identify and hold its own personnel accountable. All it needs is professionalism and a strict adherence to the principle of the rule of law.

There is also a simultaneous law-enforcement sweep against freedom of expression, both online and offline, targeting critics of the government. The police appears eager to proceed against people merely for saying something. Abusive language has indeed been used by some content creators against government functionaries. If any of that warrants police action, the applicable law should be clearly cited, and due process should be followed transparently. Instead, there are reports of arbitrary police action that appears intended more as intimidation than law enforcement, targeting protesters, their families and, in some cases, even social media platforms. At the same time, the police seem uninterested in acting against online mobs that are threatening and abusing the protesters. The Delhi police has maintained that criminals infiltrated the protests. Those involved in violence must certainly be identified and brought to justice in accordance with the law. The force has also not explained the circumstances under which pellets were fired at protesters. Police practices must adhere to established rules and standards, and any breach must be dealt with firmly. This is an occasion for both the Centre and the Court to underscore a basic constitutional principle: nobody, including the police, is above the law. The government should not appear to have gone back on its promises to the agitating students, who called off the protests once their demands were met. That would only entrench cynicism and deepen resentment among the youth who turned up in their thousands at Jantar Mantar.

The domestic trigger

- Recent **National Family Health Survey** data show that even as stunting and undernutrition remain a concern despite gains, the **sharp rise in adult overweight/obesity** and diet-related metabolic conditions **can no longer be ignored**.
- The **Standing Committee on Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution** recommended **mandatory FOP labelling** flagging whether packaged products are high in sugar, and including **sugar content in baby foods** — tackling excess sugar “right where it begins”.
- The consortium on adolescent nutrition, ‘**Let's Fix Our Food**’ (led by ICMR-NIN), recommends a healthier **school food environment**, stricter marketing regulation, and FOP labelling.

Global precedent & the numbers

★ WHAT THE WORLD IS DOING

- ▶ **WHO:** since 2017, at least **133 countries** have increased or introduced a new health tax.
- ▶ **Colombia's 'junk food law' (2023):** tackled high consumption of packaged foods — an additional tax that began at **10%**, rose to **15%**, and touched **20%** the subsequent year.
- ▶ Norway, Hungary, Denmark, Bermuda, Dominica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and the **Navajo Nation (U.S.)** have implemented taxes on unprocessed sugar and sugar-added foods.
- ▶ **ICMR-NIN:** over **17 million** children and adolescents are affected by obesity — a number that could cross **27 million by 2030**.

Analysis — why act now

- A rising burden of obesity and diet-related **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** needs a comprehensive, government-helmed strategy: **fiscal (tax) + informational (labelling) + regulatory (ads)** levers together.
- “Sin-tax” logic: taxes both **correct externalities** and **fund health systems**, while FOP labels empower informed consumer choice — effects are strongest when combined, not used in isolation.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS Paper II: issues relating to health; government policies for the vulnerable. **GS Paper III:** fiscal policy & taxation as a behavioural tool. **Mains angle:** balancing public-health gains against regressivity and industry impact.

07 Gen Z & the Reform of Merit, Exams and Dignity

GS 2 · EDUCATION

EDITORIAL

△ WHY IN NEWS

An op-ed argues the time has come to **rethink merit, reform admissions and restore dignity** to every student's academic journey — a change in policy itself so that examinations are seen as fair, professional and voluntary, and competitive exams are **no longer associated with student suicides**.

The Hindu, Page 6 (GS 2): 'Gen Z's voice must lead to a humane education system' — John Varghese, former Principal, St. Stephen's College.

Page No.6 , GS 2,3

A healthy tax

The government must act to tax foods high in fat, sugar, and salt

India, which has a long history of addressing the challenges of undernutrition, has to pivot to attack the curious phenomenon of over-nutrition that evolving lifestyles have now laid at its door. The recent National Family Health Survey data showed that in India, while stunting and undernutrition continue to be cause for concern, despite some gains, the sharp rise in adult overweight and obesity, besides diet-related metabolic conditions, cannot be ignored any more. Two unrelated developments have advanced the question of unhealthy diets in very pointed suggestions that would nudge consumers to make the right choices. First, a Parliamentary Standing Committee has recommended mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling indicating whether packaged food products are high in sugar, and second, a national consortium has advised the government to levy a health tax on high fat, salt and sugar foods, and enforce stricter regulations on their advertisements. The Standing Committee on Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution also made a recommendation to include the sugar content in baby foods, attacking the excess sugar consumption issue right where it begins. The consortium on adolescent nutrition, which goes by the practical name Let's Fix Our Food, is led by the Indian Council of Medical Research-Na-

dia and abroad, has recommended that the government ensure a healthier school food environment, stricter regulation of marketing of unhealthy food, and front-of-pack nutrition labelling. These efforts will be among the steps to tackle the rising burden of obesity and diet-related non communicable diseases that require a comprehensive strategy helmed by the government.

According to the World Health Organization, since 2017, at least 133 countries have increased or introduced a new health tax. A "junk food law" came into force in Colombia in 2023, to tackle the high consumption of packaged foods. An additional tax on such foods began at 10%, rose to 15% the next year and touched 20% the subsequent year. Norway, Hungary, Denmark, Bermuda, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Navajo Nation (U.S.), have also specifically implemented taxes on unprocessed sugar and sugar-added foods. With the ICMR-NIN report indicating that over 17 million children and adolescents are affected by obesity, and that this number can cross 27 million by 2030, there cannot be a better time to act on these suggestions that will go a long way in educating the consumer to make healthy food choices.

The diagnosis

- India's education system has produced extraordinary professional talent, yet its admission culture has created a **dangerous emotional environment** in which marks, ranks and **single-shot competitive exams** are treated as the sole measures of intelligence, worth and future possibility.
- A fair admission system must adopt a **multi-dimensional assessment of competence** — moderated school performance, discipline-specific aptitude, structured interviews, portfolios, internships and co-curricular achievement — testing reasoning, persistence, communication and ethics, not just memory and speed.

The remedies

- **Broaden the meaning of success** beyond a few high-pressure professional courses: career fairs, internships, mentorship, workplace visits and alumni engagement can expose students — even at school level — to **newer sectors** and reduce blind dependence on traditional exam-gated paths.
- **Counsel parents** — especially those with limited information who resort to unaffordable loans — in local languages on courses, careers, costs, scholarships, aptitude, mental-health risks, and the gap between a child's interests and parental ambitions.
- Help students **assess abilities, dispositions and aspirations realistically** through guidance and aptitude-based conversations rather than prestige-driven choices — a shift from **rank-based filtration to capacity-based recognition**.

Institutional design & constitutional duty

★ KEY IDEAS FROM THE ARGUMENT

- ▶ **Beyond 'one test fits all':** a single national test creates logistical overload and **demographic unfairness** (language, geography, digital access) — neither educationally sound nor socially just.
- ▶ **Decentralised, scheduled exams:** spreading exams across the calendar reduces stress, avoids a single point of failure, and tests genuine competence over coaching-driven technique.
- ▶ **Institutional responsibility:** the Constitution treats education as a **public good, not a commercial race**; legislatures must curb exploitative coaching, hostel-safety lapses and fraudulent practices via law, regulation and oversight.
- ▶ **UGC-anchored reform:** a decentralised system with universities/clusters designing and conducting their own assessments within broad norms — with strong safeguards against paper leaks.

Why it matters

- The **constitutional promise of education** cannot be fulfilled by a structure that rewards fear, debt and psychological distress — the alternative lies in **holistic assessment**, mental-health support and sustained counselling.
- Done deliberately, reform can **end the suicides caused by entrance-exam stress** and produce more confident, humane young professionals.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS Paper II: issues relating to development & management of the education sector; government policies & interventions. **Essay/Ethics:** merit, dignity and mental health in a competitive society.

08 Western Ghats — Ecologically Sensitive Area Conservation

GS 3 · ENVIRONMENT

△ WHY IN NEWS

An op-ed revisits the long-running **Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA)** debate for the Western Ghats — spanning six coastal States and internationally recognised for biodiversity — arguing that conservation must be pursued with **science and dialogue**, balancing ecology against genuine stakeholder concerns.

Western Ghats conservation with science and dialogue

The Western Ghats, spanning six coastal States of India, are internationally recognised for their rich biodiversity. They contain 39 biodiversity hotspot areas, including national parks, reserved forests, and wildlife sanctuaries declared World Heritage Sites (WHS) by UNESCO in 2012. To protect this natural heritage, the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) was constituted in 2010 under the chairmanship of ecologist, academic, and writer Madhav Gadgil. Its report recommended declaring 142 talukas covering 44 districts in the entire Western Ghats into Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA), while sub-dividing it into three Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ). Such a declaration would regulate human activities to protect fragile ecosystems and, once notified under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, would provide legal protection.

The ESA journey

Following strong local and political opposition in the States concerned to the WGEEP recommendations, the central government constituted a high-level working group headed by Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan in 2012 to review them. The group limited restrictions on economic activities and livelihoods to ecologically sensitive natural landscapes, reducing the area covered to only 37% of the Western Ghats.

Based on this recalibrated report, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) issued the first draft notification in 2014. Since the matter remained unresolved, the Ministry constituted an expert panel headed by former Director General of Forests Sanjay Kumar in 2022 to examine the concerns raised by the stakeholder States. Following the expert panel's deliberations, Gujarat and Goa appear to have agreed to the finalisation of the ESA notification, while Maharashtra has sought a fresh review.

Discussions between the Centre and other States, including Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil



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The Ecologically Sensitive Area debate highlights the need for balanced, inclusive conservation approaches

Nadu, are ongoing. A “phased rollout” or “State-wise finalisation” is possible after the inclusion of this clause in the 2024 draft notification.

Between 2015 and 2026, five draft notifications were issued as the Centre and States did not reach a consensus. Following the expiry of the last notification, in July 2026, the Ministry has extended the expert panel's tenure by another year.

The case of Karnataka

Karnataka has 10 districts in the Western Ghats, with 23.4% of the State's population residing there. Around 20,668 square kilometres have been identified for ESA declaration. Regardless of the government's political affiliation, the State has consistently opposed the proposal, citing its potential impact on agriculture, plantations, mining, and infrastructure development.

A study by this writer covered villages located in the proximity of 10 WHS across four districts – Chikkamagaluru, Kodagu, Shivamogga, and Udupi – and three other important sites in Uttara Kannada and Udupi, including the Kali Tiger Reserve, Mundigekere Bird Sanctuary (five acres and a breeding ground for cattle egrets in Sirsi), and Mookambika Wildlife Sanctuary. The study highlighted local perspectives on livelihoods and conservation efforts.

In villages adjoining the Kali Tiger Reserve and Kudremukh National Park, some residents reported accepting or considering rehabilitation packages. Those opposing relocation felt that they might eventually have to follow due to declining village populations and the resulting threat to village life. Even villages with granted forest rights have faced challenges due to restrictions on minor forest produce collection and agricultural practices. Concerns were also raised over the rejection of forest rights claims by non-tribals with long-standing residence, including in a village (at least 150 years) near the

Balahalli Reserved Forest. Meanwhile, local officials and some communities supported regulating environmentally harmful activities such as stone quarrying and unplanned tourism projects, including proposals for forest ropeways.

With specific reference to the notifications, it must be noted that local communities faced similar restrictions whenever these areas were declared protected zones, even before the WGEEP was constituted. Many residents believe that buffer zones extend 10 kilometres from core areas and fear possible eviction from their lands. Stakeholders across the study districts unanimously expressed concerns that reliance on satellite imagery for identifying ESA areas was unfair, as they were convinced that it could not distinguish plantation crops such as arecanut, shade-grown coffee, rubber, and coconut from forest cover. They also raised concerns that no committees had physically visited their villages.

In this context, Karnataka's case requires an empathetic approach that addresses genuine stakeholder concerns before a final decision is taken.

Protecting indigenous communities

In the broader context, the Union government's decision to proceed with the ESA notification for the Western Ghats reflects political will to protect ecology and biodiversity. Conservation efforts cannot be indefinitely delayed as it will result in States losing their control in such areas; ecological systems transcend administrative boundaries.

More importantly, ESA should include indigenous communities living deep within forests, as they naturally follow conservation principles and maintain a sacred, sustainable relationship with the environment despite challenging conditions. Their presence serves as a bridge between forests and mainstream society, while their absence risks the loss of biocultural diversity.

Reference infographic: the Western Ghats — extent, endemic species, protected areas, significance, threats and key committees. *Drishhti IAS*

- The Ghats contain **39 biodiversity hotspot areas** (national parks, reserved forests, sanctuaries) declared a **UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012**; they are one of India's **four biodiversity hotspots**.
- The **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP)** under **Madhav Gadgil (2010)** recommended declaring **142 talukas across 44 districts** as ESA, sub-divided into three **Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ)** — regulating human activity, with legal protection once notified under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.

The ESA journey — Gadgil to Kasturirangan to 2026

- Facing strong local/political opposition to WGEEP, the Centre set up a working group under **K. Kasturirangan (2012)**, which limited restrictions to **ecologically sensitive natural landscapes** — reducing the ESA to only **37% of the Western Ghats**.
- On that recalibrated report, **MoEF&CC** issued the **first draft notification in 2014**; between **2015 and 2026**, **five draft notifications** were issued as the Centre and States failed to reach consensus. In **July 2026** the Ministry extended the expert panel's tenure by another year.
- Gujarat and Goa appear to have agreed to finalisation; **Maharashtra** sought a fresh review; talks with **Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu** continue — a **“phased/State-wise finalisation”** is possible under the 2024 draft.

★ KARNATAKA & THE STAKEHOLDER QUESTION

- ▶ Karnataka has **10 districts** in the Ghats (23.4% of its population resides there); **~20,668 sq km** identified for ESA — the State has **consistently opposed** it, citing impacts on agriculture, plantations, mining and infrastructure.
- ▶ Communities fear **buffer zones (10 km from core areas)** and possible eviction; they argue **satellite imagery can't distinguish plantation crops** (arecanut, shade-grown coffee, rubber, coconut) from forest cover.
- ▶ **Protecting indigenous communities:** ESA should include forest-dwelling communities who **naturally follow conservation principles** — their presence bridges forests and mainstream society; their absence risks loss of **biocultural diversity**.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS Paper III: conservation, environmental impact assessment, biodiversity. **Static link:** Gadgil vs Kasturirangan recommendations; ESZ & the EP Act, 1986; Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Mains Practice Questions

ANSWER-WRITING · 01 AUGUST 2026

1

The distinction between a UNSC-*endorsed* peace plan and a UN-*commanded* operation is not merely procedural. In the context of the ‘Board of Peace’ for Gaza, examine the implications of this distinction for international legitimacy and accountability.

GS 2 · 15 marks · 250 words

2

“Floating solar is a land-light solution to a land-hungry energy transition.” Critically evaluate the potential and challenges of floating solar power in India in light of the PM Surya Sarovar Yojana.

GS 3 · 15 marks · 250 words

3

With import dependence exceeding 88% for crude oil, India's energy security is a strategic vulnerability. Discuss how schemes like ‘Samudra Manthan’ fit within a broader energy-security and transition strategy.

GS 3 · 10 marks · 150 words

4

“Nobody, including the police, is above the law.” In light of recent concerns over policing of protests, discuss the constitutional and institutional mechanisms needed to ensure police accountability.

GS 2 · 15 marks · 250 words

5

Fiscal measures, front-of-pack labelling and advertising regulation are complementary, not alternative, tools against diet-related NCDs. Examine, with reference to the proposal to tax foods high in fat, sugar and salt.

GS 2 & 3 · 15 marks · 250 words

6

A humane education system requires a shift from ‘rank-based filtration’ to ‘capacity-based recognition’. Critically examine the reforms needed in India's admission and examination architecture.

GS 2 · 10 marks · 150 words

7

The Western Ghats ESA impasse reflects the tension between ecological science and stakeholder livelihoods. Suggest a framework to reconcile conservation with the rights of forest-dependent communities.

GS 3 · 15 marks · 250 words

Prelims Practice — 10 MCQs

01 AUGUST 2026 · PART 1 OF 2

Q1. With reference to the 'Board of Peace' recently in news, consider the following statements:

1. It was established under UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (2025).
2. It functions directly under the operational command of the United Nations.
3. It is proposed to be chaired by the U.S. President.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q2. The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, often in news over migration, are located on the coast of:

- (a) Italy (b) Morocco
(c) Algeria (d) Portugal

Q3. The Strait of Gibraltar connects the Mediterranean Sea with which of the following?

- (a) Red Sea (b) Black Sea
(c) Atlantic Ocean (d) Caspian Sea

Q4. With reference to the Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana, consider the following statements:

1. It targets 5,000 MW of floating solar capacity by 2030-31.
2. It is to be implemented by the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI).
3. Supported projects must include at least two hours of battery storage.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q5. India's largest floating solar park, the Omkareshwar project, is located on which river?

- (a) Godavari (b) Narmada
(c) Krishna (d) Tapi

Prelims Practice — 10 MCQs

01 AUGUST 2026 · PART 2 OF 2

Q6. The scheme ‘Samudra Manthan’ recently approved by the Cabinet is associated with:

- (a) Deep-sea mining of polymetallic nodules
- (b) National offshore hydrocarbon exploration
- (c) Coastal shipping and port modernisation
- (d) Marine fisheries and blue economy

Q7. Consider the following statements about India's energy import dependence:

1. India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil.
2. India's import dependence for crude oil is over 88%.
3. India's import dependence for natural gas is about 50%.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q8. The ‘junk food law’ often cited in the debate on taxing HFSS foods was first enforced in 2023 by:

- (a) Chile
- (b) Mexico
- (c) Colombia
- (d) Brazil

Q9. The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) was chaired by:

- (a) K. Kasturirangan
- (b) Madhav Gadgil
- (c) Sanjay Kumar
- (d) Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan

Q10. With reference to the Western Ghats, consider the following statements:

1. They were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012.
2. They span six States of India.
3. ESA notification, once issued, derives legal force from the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer Key & Explanations

01 AUGUST 2026

ANSWER KEY

Q1

B

Q2

B

Q3

C

Q4

D

Q5

B

Q6

B

Q7

D

Q8

C

Q9

B

Q10

D

Q1 (B): The Board of Peace is a US-led body under **UNSC Res. 2803 (2025)**, chaired by the U.S. President; it is **not** under UN command though the plan it supports is UNSC-endorsed. Hence statement 2 is wrong.

Q2 (B): Ceuta and Melilla are autonomous Spanish cities on the **Mediterranean coast of Morocco** — the EU's only land borders with Africa.

Q3 (C): The **Strait of Gibraltar** separates Spain from Morocco and connects the **Mediterranean Sea** with the **Atlantic Ocean**.

Q4 (D): All three are correct: the **₹5,070-cr** scheme targets **5,000 MW** by 2030-31, is implemented by **SECI**, and mandates **≥2 hours** of battery storage (10,000 MWh across the programme).

Q5 (B): The **278 MW Omkareshwar** floating solar park is on the **Narmada** in Khandwa district, Madhya Pradesh — scaling toward 600 MW, but without onsite storage.

Q6 (B): ‘Samudra Manthan’ is the **National Offshore Exploration Scheme** of the Petroleum Ministry (₹84,084 cr up to FY2030-31) targeting reserves of over **600 MMTOE**.

Q7 (D): All three are correct — the very vulnerability Samudra Manthan seeks to reduce through offshore exploration.

Q8 (C): **Colombia's** junk-food law (2023) taxed high-consumption packaged foods, rising from **10% to 15% to 20%** across years. Per WHO, 133+ countries have adopted health taxes since 2017.

Q9 (B): The **WGEEP (2010)** was chaired by **Madhav Gadgil**; the later 2012 review working group was headed by **K. Kasturirangan**, which cut the ESA to ~37% of the Ghats.

Q10 (D): All correct — UNESCO WHS (2012), six coastal States, and ESA legal protection flows from the **EP Act, 1986**.